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ABSTRACT

This paper examines existing and model curriculums from all disciplines offering public relations courses in terms of the philosophical and theoretical developments relevant to public relations. First, the paper outlines the model curriculum derived from the 1987 study cosponsored by the Public Relations Society of America and the Association of Educators in Journalism and Mass Communication. Second, the paper analyzes, in terms of the "ideal" curriculum model, a review of 3,201 U.S. university and college catalogues, identifying 578 undergraduate departments offering public relations courses. Third, the paper focuses on P. Hamilton's survey of theory and curriculum, especially on journalism/mass communication and communication/speech communication respondents' views of theories in terms of awareness, validity, and usefulness. Lastly, the paper examines the M. Fitch-Hauser survey of public relations programs for program characteristics and confirms the large number of public relations programs in speech communication departments. The paper integrates the results into a new curriculum proposal, one that best fits a multicultural, multifunctional, and integrating model of public relations. In conclusion, the paper suggests a movement away from publics to a more cohesive approach toward the public relations professional creating a sense of community. Fifteen references are attached. (Author/SR)

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THE MOST DESIRABLE PREPARATION FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS: FIT OF EXISTING AND MODEL CURRICULUM WITH THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL DEVELOPMENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

Existing and model curriculums from all disciplines offering public relations courses are examined in terms of the philosophical and theoretical developments relevant to public relations. First, the model curriculum derived from the 1987 Commission study cosponsored by PRSA (Public Relations Society of American) and AEJMC (Association of Educators in Journalism and Mass Communication) is outlined. Second, the review of 3,201 U.S. university and college catalogues identifying 578 undergraduate departments offering public relations courses is analyzed in terms of the "ideal" curriculum model. Third, Hamilton's survey focuses on journalism/mass communication and communication(s)/speech communications respondents view of theories in terms of awareness, validity, and usefulness. Lastly, the Fitz-Hauser examines program characteristics and confirms the large number of public relations programs in speech communication departments. The results are integrated into a new curriculum proposal, one that best fits a multicultural, multifunctional, and Integrating model of public relations. The conclusions suggest a movement away from publics to a more cohesive approach toward the public relations professional creating a sense of community.

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THE MOST DESIRABLE PREPARATION FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS:

FIT OF EXISTING AND MODEL CURRICULUM

WITH THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The most desirable preparation for public relations professionals is explored from four aspects: 1) the evolutionary development of public relations, 2) the ideal model proposed by the 1987 AEJMC and PRSA Commission, 3) the present professional training as revealed by university and college catalogs, 4) the Hamilton survey on theories and models used in public relations, and 5) the Fitch-Hauser survey of public relations programs.

The Evolution of Public Relations:
Tasks, Functions, and Roles.

The evolutionary developments surrounding public relations are primarily seen in the communication(s) and journalism disciplines, the major contributors to the development of public relations curriculum. Very early in human history public communication was an integral part of life. The activities noted as PR were borrowed from the basic principles of public communication which developed in ancient Greece. The first important book, written by Aristotle, offered rhetoric--the art of persuasion. The sophists during this time were paid persuaders.

Public relations since this period has developed in a variety of directions. Some retained the techniques developed by the sophists stressing the "importance of researching one's area, analyzing the data, and communicating their findings."[1] Other social, economic, technological, and political forces created opportunities expanding PR activities into new arenas.

Prior to Mass Production. The Romans understood the importance of an informed populace and formed networks to disseminate their communication. The church was a prime developer of "propaganda" during a period where propaganda had a positive connotation of spreading the word of God. The church practiced PR extensively and with some effectiveness.

The early printed material were best representative of what we call publicity today. The variety of printed approaches to persuasion existed before the invention of the printing press. Prior to the invention of the printing press, the printed materials were not as effective in reaching large groups quickly but certainly, in many cases, persuasive for those audiences who were educated.

Invention of the Printing Press. Gutenberg's press opened up a new dissemination tool for reaching many people. Out of this invention grew press agentry--the birth of publicity.

Much later during the industrial revolution the big companies used the newspapers as a major outlet for advertising. When

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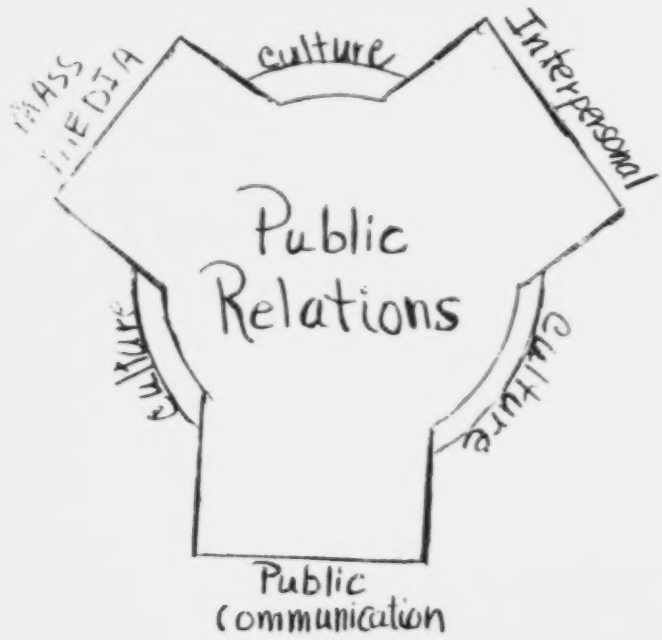
business discovered the effectiveness of publicity, the "journalists" were hired to represent big industry and the first publicity agencies (firms) were formed. The period of the muckraker reflected the newspaper professionals redefining themselves. Some journalists felt limited by the expectations surrounding print and left for a public relations career. Also at this time PR was extensively influenced by economic, technological, and social forces in this country. The U.S. was a powerful industrialized nation with a well-developed mass media and educated populace.[2] PR became defined as publicity involving the heavy use of the media. Interestingly enough the first PR agency was formed in Boston in 1900 and was called The Publicity Bureau.[3] "Radio and television complimented the work of the press" and simply reinforced the concept that PR was synonymous with media.[4]

New NonMedia Influence. Moving on beyond the mass media definitions of PR as publicity, the PR literature has recently stressed the counseling mode of public relations, a role more fitting of what Vibbert and Crable call communication management.[5] Here the emphasis shifts for the first time from the mass media to skills more closely aligned to interpersonal and organizational communication. Coming full circle around to the evolution of public relations, the professional must not forget the early skills developed --those of public communication.

It is with this integration of major trends in the social, political, and industrial developments of America that a full model of public relations emerges as displayed below.



The model of the international public relations features the various roles and functions as primarily either mass media, interpersonal, or public communication.[6] The model is a kaleidoscope of possibilities in each culture. In the U.S., public

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relations depends on a free press and a large business populace. In another country print may not be extensively organized as a mass media and the interpersonal or community networks are more key to disseminating ideas. Or the government-owned media makes public relations difficult to implement on the mass media level. Whatever the social, political, technological, and/or industrial circumstances, the public relations's roles and functions are affected by these circumstances or realities.

Note one key aspect that is missing from this multicultural model of public relations. Public relations as serving or targeting public(s) is not an aspect of this model. It is acknowledged that identifying publics is a concrete and visual way of dividing up the world. Yet the idea of a professional serving a client who wishes to persuade public(s) seems very self-serving and a narrow way of viewing public relations. An alternative view of this boundary spanning role is proposed in the suggestions below.

Multicultural and Multifunctional Model: Implications for PR Professional Preparedness

The multicultural model proposed in the previous section serves as the basis or background for discussing public relations in terms of the professional's preparedness for a career. This orientation will assist you in interpreting the following for developing a professional curriculum.

SUGGESTION--TEACH FROM A MULTICULTURAL AND MULTIFUNCTIONAL MODEL OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

PR must be taught as an international concept in terms of the variety of tools, functions, techniques, etc. available. The overlay of culture transforms public relations into a model more sensitive to the world which is, in reality, knocking at America's door.

International forces have changed the face of American business. Why wait for international public relations to do the same. By viewing public relations in an international context, the three areas of public relations functions become richer in meaning. Mass media is interpreted in terms of multicultural values rather than the sophistication or dependence on American media.

Public relations then requires different types of expertise when viewed through an international perspective. In fact, just talking about ethics becomes a very different matter when related as an international concept. How well are PR professionals prepared for these differences? At the present moment, the view of public relations is very much an American flavor.

SUGGESTION: APPROACH PR AS AN INTEGRATIVE, PREVENTATIVE, AND CREATIVE MEANS FOR DEALING WITH THE ISSUES, CRISES, AND MATURATION OF A CIVILIZATION.

An exceptually helpful book developing this point was authored by Dean Kruckeberg and Kenneth Starch entitled Public Relations and

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Community A Reconstructed Theory. In this book, the authors propose that in light of the developments of the Chicago School of Social Thought, public relations be redefined as developing a sense of community. These authors pose the problem as:

> Public relations early adopted--and has continued to apply--the transmission model of communication, that is, principles rooted in persuasion and advocacy rather than principles based on social involvement and participation."[7]

The authors go on to say that "the loss of community has contributed to the evolution of contemporary public relations."[6] In fact, the conclusions is reached that many of the problems today would not develop if PR developed a sense of community. It would be wonderful if public relations operated in a preventative mode rather than on a crises or problem basis. What does this say about the case and campaign courses? Professionals may want to rethink their emphasis in that area. The authors specific suggestions outline the role of a practitioner in terms of developing a sense of community:

> 1. Practitioners can help community members and the organizations they represent become conscious of common interests that are the basis for both their contentions and their solutions.
> 2. Practitioners can help individuals in the community to overcome alienation in its several forms.
> 3. Practitioners can help their organizations assume the role that Dewey reserved for the public schools, that is, in helping to create a sense of community.
> 4. Leisure time of contemporary society is not well considered by most organizations.
> 5. Consummatory, that is self-fulfilling, communication offers an immediate enhancement of life, which can be enjoyed for its own sake. Most practitioners, concerned with persuasion and advocacy, do not encourage such communication; rather, they focus on merely instrumental, or practical, communication.[8]

Although the local newspaper is offered as one of the answers to building a sense of community, the journalist cannot ethically serve that role. True even our own local newspaper has started a "Neighbors" section which is filled with PR releases. But the majority of the newspaper avoids being self-serving and remains the observer of the community. Sure we don't always like to hear what is printed but for a newspaper to be devoted to the community is a violation of the journalistic code.

For example, recently our regional paper in Northwest Indiana had an extensive series on the racial divisiveness of our area. People were very angry but the truth is that condition exists. A journalist has that obligation to point that out. The public

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relations practitioner's job is to build community but the journalist have the same degree of commitment but must remain the observer. The reporter has to remain able to interpret "what is" in the community. If the PR professionals contribute to community development, then the job of the reporter is to report this.

My approach is not to expect the newspaper to build a community, particularly to become involved in the political forces. For example, as a public relations professional, I prefer to serve on boards of organizations whose purpose is to build a sense of community. So I head a board concerned with a children's chorale. The goal is to mix the children of different faiths, races, ethnic background, and geographical location for the purpose of song. I spend a lot of time communicating this to the media and interpersonally working to keep the group on track of this purpose. A journalist cannot be expected to have this role and retain the observer role. So, again, we have to be careful on relying on the media to go beyond their professional domain.

A second reservation in viewing the PR practitioner's role as bringing about a sense of community is the perspective that the professional is a facilitator. While facilitation is part of the role, facilitation remains only one aspect. My quandary was evident when I was asked to list my profession in Who's Who. After a great deal of soul searching, I did not say public relations as the primary descriptor. The PR concept is too loaded with American interpretations. I chose to list myself as a communication developmental facilitator. This working title is still not satisfactory but did seem to describe what my efforts were like in public relations. Does that mean public relations may need to be renamed--possibly. It more likely means that public relations, although having a facilitator's role, should have what I call a developmental intent. Not only does one facilitate relationships towards a sense of community but the public relations professional contributes to the development or creation of the community. Not as in giving answers or having a plan but more in processing the existing possibilities. Not, in the more negative sense, as in goal striving or manipulation, but in reorienting possibilities. Thus we are more than problem solvers, more than crises managers, more than trouble shooters. Public relations in the most professional sense is listening for what is missing and creating the listening for what is possible.

In summary, we are looking for public relations professionals who are trained in multicultural and multifunctional approach for creating a sense of community. Facilitating communication is not enough as in negotiation, arbitrator, etc. PR should not be stuck in primarily a crises or problem solving mode. The skills needed should not simply facilitate communication when called upon but should utilize the communication process to prevent problematic situations from arising. Presented in the following section is a review of present known research in terms of satisfying the multicultural and multifunctional aspects of the PR model already presented.

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THE MOST DESIRABLE PREPARATION FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS: A RESEARCH-BASED RESPONSE

Recommending the most desirable preparation for a public relations professional is based on what philosophically and theoretically makes sense and not on "what is" being taught at the present time. Present curriculums are thus put into perspective of a larger context than the particular discipline being represented. Therefore, the model put forth in the previous section stressing the multicultural, preventative approach, and sense of community are the guiding principles for public relations.

National research projects focusing on the preparation of public relations professionals are represented by several projects: the model 1987 Commission study by AEJMC and PRSA, the survey of university and college catalogs by Neff, the survey on theory and curriculum by Hamilton in 1986, and the Fitz-Hauser survey of public relations programs.

COMMISSION STUDY.

The model curriculum identified in the 1987 Commission study surveyed both academician and practitioners, a sample size of 544 questionnaires. The response rate per professional association was never provided but the questionnaire was sent to PRSA, IABC, ICA, and SCA plus a cross-section of leading practitioners.

Results. The most significant contributions and the most misunderstood aspect of the Commission study is the identification of the content areas recommended for PR professional preparation. The survey identified six content areas as an ideal pubic relations curriculum model. The six content areas are:

> Principles: Practices and Theory of Public Relations
> PR Techniques: Writing, Message Dissemination, Networks
> PR Research for Planning and Evaluation
> PR Strategy and Implementation
> Supervised PR Experience
> Specialized Advanced Study (Recommended)[9]

These areas seem familiar to everyone. Fitting your courses into these content areas is easily done.

However, I do not recommend that you run out and develop a program around these area without some thought. First, the multicultural/international aspects can be incorporated into all courses without a special course being taught. There is no way to test the full implementation of this dimension in the ideal commission model. It is clear that multicultural and international emphases are never mentioned except in one context. In the sixth recommended content area called the Advanced Level of Recommended Course, international public relations was one of the responses solicited. In context of the other Recommended Courses the list indicates the low priority given to international public relation.

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

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(Sixth Course-Advanced Level)
(A score of 6 is high)

6.43	publicity and media relations
6.01	community relations
6.00	employee relations
5.71	consumer relations law
5.29	financial relations
5.26	public affairs/lobbying
4.93	fundraising/membership development
4.50	international public relations

The most you can say is international public relations barely made the list in the sixth content area which is not the required core for PR professional preparation. This suggests that neither academician or practitioners are particularly concerned about international public relations.

There is an additional concern about public relations. From previous research the following concern was expressed.

> Two aspects of ethics are of concern to the public relations professional.... One area of ethical concern focuses on public relations as directed by public relations professionals who refuse to be sensitive to the multicultural dimension and impose the American view. Secondly, an equally noted concern regarding the teaching of public relations to internationals who do not share the cultural principles espoused in public relations.[9]

Limitations. Professor John Madsen, Department of Business at Buena Vista College, sees one major concern in the Commission's study. Sending a survey to practitioners and academicians is to address the same audience. The academicians train the practitioners and rarely is there a great difference in philosophy. Dr. Madsen suggests that sending the questionnaire to the practitioner's supervisor (the boss) might have resulted in different responses to the questionnaire. The employer might be clearer on the professional requirements and have a less biased view.

COLLEGE CATALOG SURVEY

In the review of 3,201 university and college catalogs, 580 undergraduate departments listed public relations courses (Neff). At least 1,265 undergraduate courses were listed in departments of communication(s), journalism, mass communication, public relations, business, and a miscellaneous category for the few departments which did not fit the primary categories.[10] Since the academics in the Commission survey no doubt are represented in the catalogs, there is some degree of cross-check in what is indicated as "ideal" to what is actually offered.

The listed catalog courses fit, in most cases, into the content areas developed by the Commission report (only 14 courses could not be classified under the 6 areas). The table below

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indicates the course coverage per department for the Commission's content areas.

Model Curriculum Fit[11]
(courses coverage for content area per departments type)

	Princ	Tech	Resea	Strat	Super	Recomm
Com240	93%	32%	8%	21%	46%	11%
Jou124	95%	43%	3%	28%	41%	11%
Bus100	69%	6%	0%	3%	8%	28%
INT45	100%	49%	18%	22%	33%	11%
MAS37	103%	33%	5%	49%	64%	15%
MIS23	113%	4%	0%	22%	4%	0%
PR13	78%	54%	23%	23%	46%	23%

Because there was a content analysis of the course title and course description, the support for the proposed model of multicultural/multifunctional/community emphasis was considered. This analysis revealed few courses offered any mention of multicultural/international concerns. Those few courses would be found in the Recommended Content Area under Topics, the least supported content area. So the multicultural dimension fell to last place for both the Commission and the College Catalog Survey.

Support for a preventative skills/philosophical approach is not reflected in the content areas. In fact, the opposite is represented by the one-fourth of all departments offering a strategy type of course (case and campaign). Here the emphasis is on problem solving, crises communication etc. The interpersonal body of knowledge is not represented by the six content areas of the Commission and does not show up under the "Other" category which primarily focuses on publicity and publics. Therefore, the interpersonal and communication theory areas are not represented. The curriculum is following the the idea that the PR professional is a problem solver--not an ideal to emulate when developing a curriculum.

Some mention of the newspaper business as a foci for developing a sense of community. However, the ethical constraints on newspapers would not allow this. Instead there must be more attention given to interpersonal communication, the building of networks in a community. Another avenue would be the principles content area, the most frequent course offered, which should reflect course content focusing on communication theories, etc, key areas for building cohesiveness in the nation.

The significance of the catalog review is its comprehensive analysis of the courses offered in public relations. As a baseline for a longitudinal study, the research documents the evolution of PR discipline. In fact, the evolution is already taking place as evidenced by the results from selected telephone interviews of those departments offering sequences of 4 or more courses. The interview support movement toward interpersonal communication and a reduced emphasis on journalistic type of courses. This support Gibson's contention that there is a "lively ongoing debate

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regarding the value of training in primarily print-media skills."[12] The most frequently sought professional is one with both a Ph.D. and practical experience and there is little willingness to compromise on these hiring criteria.

THEORY SURVEY

The theories a discipline holds are key to predicting what will happen in that discipline. In a survey of perceptions held by public relations faculty on various communication/behavior science theories, 20 theories were selected for review (Hamilton). A total of 125 academician returned the survey. Three areas were examined: familiarity with each theory, the validity of each theory to PR, and the usefulness of a theory for PR.

Familiarity: Results indicate that there were no differences between the journalism/mass communication and speech and communication(s) in awareness of theory except for two instances. Speech communication/communication(s) faculty indicated some familiarity with Grunig's models at a 72.2% level. Journalism/mass communication faculty said that they were familiar with this theory at the 97.1 % level. Speech communication/communication(s) faculty indicated familiarity with the social learning theory at an 87.0% level and journalism/mass communications faculty were familiar with this theory at the 65.7% level. The time lapse of this study (research conducted in 1986) does not allow for the impact of Grunig's presence in the communication associations for the last 4 years. Today the Grunig model has been promoted among communication professional organizations (International Communication Association and Speech Communication Association) and the awareness level, no doubt, is much higher.

Listing the theories rated 90% or above by both disciplines should give one an opportunity to assess the theories driving the field of public relations. The academics listed the following theories for awareness in the 90% or greater level: agenda setting, classical conditioning (100% for both), dissonance, hierarchy of needs, inoculation, two-step flow, operant condition, and systems theory.

Validity. The degree to which the 20 theories were valid was rated on a scale with 5 indicating a high degree of validity. The results indicated that only two theories were perceived significantly differently. According to Hamilton, "the communication(s)/speech communication group rated constructivism at 3.33 while the journalism/mass communications group rated this theory at a 2.53 level of validity. At the same time the journalism/mass communications group rated social learning at 3.90 while the communication/speech communication faculty rated it at 3.27."[7]

T The 3 theories rated highly as valid by journalism/mass communications (over 4.00) were: uses and gratifications (4.43), systems theory (4.38), and dissonance theory (4.09). Communication(s)/speech communication rated systems theory highly at 4.13 and classical conditioning at 4.0.

Hamilton concludes that both academic groups generally evaluated these theories the same.

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Usefulness. Only two theories were almost significantly difference enough to suggest the application value to public relations. Speech communication/communication(s) rated constructivism at 2.94 on the utility scale and Grunig's model of public relations at 3.63. Journalism/mass communication rated these same theories at 2.35 and 3.32, both ratings approaching a much lower significant difference.

These differences may be critical. The Grunig models provide a foundation for building other theories and have a important role in new theory development. Constructivism, although rated low by both, the fact that communication(s)/speech communication academics are seeing a almost a significantly greater utility in the constructivism theory may provide the edge in theory development. Otherwise only systems theory was rated highly in utility by both speech communication/communication(s) (4.11) and journalism/mass communication (4.00).

Conclusions. The respondents were generally skeptical about the usefulness of theory for public relations. Obviously there has not been much work in this area to demonstrate the possibilities. Furthermore, theory should be reworked to reflect the needs of public relations.

One interesting sidelight is another study conducted by Hamilton in curriculum (163 schools involved in the study). The results indicate that more than 50% of the journalism/mass communication departments require 5 courses in public relations and more than 50% of the speech communication/communication(s) departments require 3 courses for public relations. Journalism stresses heavily PR techniques which essentially requires students to take courses in lay-out, graphics, or other print production courses. Communication(s) departments stress internships in the professional sequence and broadcasting courses outside of the professional sequence. Thus the major is more consistent across journalism/mass communication departments and that speech communication/communication(s) departments are going under greater "change and evolution".[13]

PROGRAM SURVEY

A total of 210 departments from communication and journalism responded to this survey (Fitch-Hauser). This study had nearly less than half the number of departments represented by the national survey of college catalogs and included Canadian departments (analysis never distinguishes between Canadian and USA responses).

As found in the Neff study, speech communication departments offer more programs in public relations than journalism (speech Communication 34.3% and Journalism 15.7%). Mass Communication Departments indicated the greatest decline in enrollments. One interesting aspect was that "more respondents from Journalism departments (13.8%) reported having full-time PR faculty with Ed.D.'s than did any other type of department except Mass Communication (15.0%). Journalism also reported the highest percentage of full-time PR faculty with the terminal degree being a Masters degrees, a total of 61.29% of the Journalism respondents.

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Required internships were high for both Journalism (93.75%) and Speech Communication (89.3%). Although study reported out on graduate programs, the study was a much smaller sample size which reduced the possibility of accurately identifying these programs.[14]

Conclusions

The recommendations for preparing public relations professionals much be developed in terms of a multicultural, multifunctional, community model. As Max Lerner stated in a recent National Public Radio presentation--our country needs first access (access to opportunity) and he thinks we are doing well on this. So what our country needs now says Lerner is "nexus" or center, a feeling of cohesiveness. Our country is so divided.

To fulfill this perspective, the public relations professional's curriculum will need to be reoriented. The Neff research indicates that the present curriculum offerings in colleges and universities across the nation supports the ideal curriculum model developed by the 1987 AEJMC/PRSA Commission. But this match does not acknowledge the international status quo, the evolutionary developments in public relations as a cohesive whole, and does not direct these efforts to a larger purpose other than serving a client (public). The interviews of departments heads with sequences of 5 or more courses in speech communication/communication(s) departments indicates an affirmation of interpersonal communication and a deemphasis of the journalistic approaches.

The theories survey by Hamilton affirms that the academics are skeptical about theory working in public relations. While both disciplines have similar awareness, the perception of validity was significant for two theories. Speech communication/communication(s) rated constructivism at 3.33 while journalism/mass communication rated this theory at a 2.53 level. This theory should be explored further in terms of its application to public relations. One other contrast between the disciplines indicated the communication(s) academics further affirmed constructivism and Grunig's PR models as a useful theory, almost on the significant level. The only theory rated high on usefulness for both disciplines was systems theory.

Fitch-Hauser`s study supports Neff's survey in terms of speech communication/communication(s) departments offering the most programs in public relations. Because of the great number of PR programs, Hamilton's survey demonstrating flux in speech communication/communication(s) departments (only 3 courses required in contrast to journalism/mass communication's standard 5 courses, primarily in print). Notably, the data indicates the speech communication/communication(s) disciplines, as a more recent PR emphasis, is searching for the best combination of preparation for future public relations professionals.

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